

Yunyang Phoenix Lantern Dance in the Context of Contemporary Communication: Cultural Cognition and Platform Presentation

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the contemporary communication of the Yunyang Phoenix Lantern Dance, a traditional folk performing art, through social media platforms. The objectives of the study are to investigate the mechanisms of platform-based presentation, analyze audiences' cultural perceptions, and propose strategies for social media communication. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, consisting of platform content observation, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that short-video platforms often fragment the performance into separate segments, thereby diminishing its cultural meanings and ritual contexts. The study concludes that sustainable communication of cultural heritage requires a “Collaborative Narrative” strategy to achieve a balance between algorithm-driven visual appeal and cultural understanding.

Keywords: Yunyang Phoenix Lantern Dance, Social Media, Cultural Cognition

Introduction

The study and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) have progressively shifted from a static preservation model to a dynamic living-heritage paradigm. Traditional performing arts face a double challenge: they require sustained digital visibility to survive, but mere visibility (e.g., a 15-second short video) cannot guarantee accurate cultural understanding. This study focuses on the Yunyang Phoenix Lantern Dance from Shiyan City, Hubei Province, China. Traditionally performed in festival contexts, it functions as a carrier of public emotion. The visual elements, such as the phoenix-shaped lantern prop and the collective performance spatial formations, are central to its imagery. As the dance circulates through social media platforms via scrolling feeds and algorithms, this paper scrutinizes how this platformization reorganizes cultural perception.

Research Objectives and Scope

The study aims to:

1. Investigate the communication mechanisms of the dance across social media platforms.
2. Analyze the characteristics of cultural cognition among audiences.
3. Propose guidelines for sustainable communication. The scope covers digital data from 2023 to 2026 across platforms (Douyin, Kuaishou, WeChat, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu), and targets a sample of 400 valid survey respondents alongside 12 to 18 key informants.



Literature Review

The dance's complete sequence involves spatial establishment, phoenix animation, rhythmic climaxes, and a stable conclusion. The dance thrives in public squares and requires intricate ensemble performance. Platformization theory (Nieborg & Poell, 2018) posits that platforms actively dictate cultural visibility, often favoring fragmentation. This study structures cultural cognition into five dimensions: Meaning Understanding, Cultural Memory, Identity Recognition, Emotional Attachment, and Participation Approach.

Research Methodology

A mixed-methods design is employed. It includes:

1. Digital Ethnography: Coding social media content from Douyin, WeChat, Bilibili, etc.
2. Quantitative Survey: Collecting ~400 valid responses using a 5-point Likert scale across four age cohorts (15-17, 18-35, 36-59, 60+).
3. Qualitative Interviews: Focus groups with 24-32 respondents and in-depth interviews with 12-18 key informants.

Research Results & Discussion

The analysis reveals a "Fragmentation and Spectacle Paradigm" on algorithm-driven networks like Douyin. While achieving high communicability, this strips the dance of its communal semiotics. A cognitive bifurcation exists: younger demographics show high emotional attachment but low meaning understanding, while audiences on knowledge-oriented platforms (e.g., Bilibili) demonstrate deeper cultural memory.

Conclusion and Acknowledgement

High online visibility does not equate to deep cultural cognition. Content producers must adopt a "Collaborative Narrative" strategy, using short-video platforms for initial attention and intentionally utilizing platform affordances (pinned comments, cross-platform linking) to provide necessary cultural scaffolding.

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